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THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH.¹

I N speaking on the same subject as that selected for the Discussion that is to take place to-morrow morning, I do not seek to forestall the results of that discussion. Nor shall I attempt to deal with what to many may seem the more profound and significant aspects of the problem, such as, for example, the relation of our finite knowing to absolute knowing, or the place which our particular truths must have in a final and complete metaphysical system. My aim is rather to set forth simply and clearly some of the more general considerations that ought, in my judgment, to be kept in mind when this subject is under debate.

Now the first requisite in this discussion is surely a definite understanding as to what truth the discussion is about. 'True' and 'false' are adjectives like 'red' and 'sweet' or 'good' and 'bad,' and, like them, must be taken to qualify some object or objects. But the objects they actually are taken to qualify are various, and hence an ambiguity in the conception of truth. We not only apply the terms to ideas, supposals, judgments, propositions, beliefs, and the like, but we also meet with true and false friends, true courage and beauty, false modesty and honor, and, alas, sometimes false dice, hair, and teeth. In this sense falsity may be itself a character of truth: "his faith unfaithful kept him falsely true." In the Hegelian philosophy we have another use of the term, according to which the higher category is truer than the lower, teleology is the truth of mechanism, spirit the truth of nature. We shall avoid at least one source of confusion if we

¹ Delivered as the Presidential Address before the American Philosophical Association at Cornell University, December 27, 1907.

agree, to begin with, that our concern is with the truth of propositions. We assume that propositions are either true or false, or neither true nor false, or, in case a number of propositions are involved, are at once partly true and partly false, and that, in any case, regarding any intelligible proposition the question can be asked whether it is true or false, and in what way.

If we agree to this, then certain not inconsiderable consequences would seem to follow. One, and most important, is that we recognize the truth we are talking about as a quality found in quite particular truths. For every proposition, whatever its range or comprehension, expresses and embodies a single, even if complex, truth, and the number of possible truths is as infinite as the number of possible propositions. This is not to say that truths are disconnected, or are, or relate to, 'independent entities,' or are merely externally connected in a series. Propositions hang together; one truth implies, follows from, leads to another. Hence the possibility is not excluded that many truths may cohere together to form a system, and that all truths may ultimately appear as elements in one comprehensive system or realm of truth. But this last should not be dogmatically assumed at the outset in such a way as to prejudice investigation into the nature and conditions of particular truths. Not even the most resolute defender of an absolute system would maintain that such a system was even remotely attainable by man.¹ Not only have the propositions in common use little or no evident connection, but within the most organized forms of our knowledge,—the sciences,—principles of wide import in one department are totally ignored in others. Moreover, a system of truth is really, from the propositional point of view, a system of truths, and cannot, as such, be expressed or exhibited in any single proposition. Philosophers, as we know too well, often require for the expression of their systems one or several pretty ponderous volumes. A true system would be one, all of whose propositions were true and also connected. Propositions about the system, however, are just as particular as propositions about its parts or about the

¹ "It would be impossible that any man should have a world, the various provinces of which were quite rationally connected, or appeared always in a system." Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 367.

connections of its parts. At the outset, then, we ought, I think, in this discussion to recognize to the full the particularity of all propositional truths, and that whether they have to do with the more special or the more general aspects of their subject-matter. We ought, as far as possible, to avoid talking of truth 'at large'; and we ought equally to be on our guard against any bias in favor of a peculiar type of truth, as, for example, scientific as opposed to philosophical truth, or *vice versa*, or of either as against the episodic truths of every-day life. For if every propositional truth is particular, there is no *prima facie* reason for regarding one as more or less true than another, so far, that is, as it is true at all. Truths differ in value and significance; some are trivial, some perhaps sublime. But, apart from special theory, there is no apparent reason why a proposition about even so trivial a circumstance as the present state of the weather, — which indeed may be important enough on occasion, — should not be as true as the truest propositions about such exalted objects as the existence of God, the constitution of the universe, and the destiny of the human soul.

The next point is, that the truth of any proposition must be judged with reference to its own unique meaning and intent. It means to assert something specific about something in particular, whether the form of the proposition be particular or general. If it means to assert something about 'this,' it must not be condemned because it does not assert something else, or because it tells you nothing about 'that,' or because it does not exhaust the possibilities or attain the ideal of a fully unified knowledge. It may be quite true, for example, that a certain train is scheduled to leave the station at five o'clock, whatever may be true, in metaphysical reference, as to the nature of space and time or, in economic reference, as to the management of a railway system. But if this is so, then we cannot admit, from the propositional point of view, that doctrine of 'degrees of truth' which asserts that every proposition is partly false because of the modification it would receive by supplementation and re-arrangement when brought into relation with other elements which, for the time being, have been left out of account. This assertion appears to

rest on a different conception of truth, Judged by its own meaning and intent, a proposition may be true without being all that is true, and a truth that is only true about the whole need not be more wholly true than one that is about the meanest of its parts. Again, a proposition that is complex may contain more truth than another without on that account being any more true. It is plausibly objected to this, that truths are not independent, that they at least tend to systematic union. And this we have admitted. But then, it is said, as elements in a system, each truth must modify and be modified by all the others; as a member of the system, it cannot remain what it was in isolation, it gets transformed, and the more so in proportion to the width and depth of its connections. And from this it follows, on the argument, regarding 'Reality' as a system one of whose aspects is a completely unified 'Truth,' that all truths, in the end, are 'error,' and that, for example, mathematics, the most exact of the sciences, is also, as the most abstract, the least 'true' of all.¹ We escape this consequence, I think, by holding strictly to our principle that the truth of any proposition must be judged with reference to its own unique meaning and intent, and by distinguishing between truth and its evaluation. A given truth does, indeed, suffer modification in being systematically connected with other truths, but such modification need not be at all one of the truth of the proposition, but only of the way the truth is held, understood, and appreciated. Thus the schoolboy may know only the isolated truths that $5 + 2 = 7$ and that $5 \times 2 = 10$; but if he later comes to see that these truths are connected, that $5 + 2 = 7$ because $5 \times 2 = 10$, and *vice versa*, that neither would be true if the other were false, or if, as a philosophical mathematician, he holds a theory of numbers which throws light on the nature and connection of these propositions, he certainly holds these truths in a different way, they have for him a different value; but how has the truth of either proposition been itself affected? That $5 + 2 = 7$ is, I suppose, as true, neither more nor less, to the mathematician as to the schoolboy, though the former has so many more connected truths at command that it has for him a richer signification. For truths too, like sensible facts, have an

¹ Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 370.

import beyond their own intrinsic quality. Of course, the proposition in question is quite true only relatively to the general character of its own number system ; but this was implied in its assertion. But in this reference its truth would not be in the least affected by the discovery, or invention, of a different number system, if that were possible, just as a truth in Euclid is not affected by the equally valid, though less serviceable, truths of other geometrical systems.

The fact that one truth is not, as such, altered by its connection with other truths, may appear perhaps in a still clearer light, if we take a case where, as things stand, there is no such connection, and then imagine what would happen if such a connection were brought about. "This table is round," and "this table cost \$500," are propositions which have no sort of logical connection ; and hence the truth of the one would, in so far, be unaffected by that of the other. But suppose that round tables were exceedingly difficult to make, and that, besides being rare for this reason, they were esteemed peculiarly beautiful. Then they would be objects desired of the rich and coveted by the connoisseur, and a connection between the shape and the price would be so definitely established that we should see at once that a true proposition about the one would involve a corresponding proposition about the other. But would either proposition be more or less true ? Would the table be any more or less round, or its price any dearer or cheaper ? The suggestion is manifestly absurd. The difference would lie not in the truth, but in the truth's evaluation.

It being understood, then, that the truth we are talking about is truth of propositions, that every proposition is specific, and that its truth is relative to its intended meaning, we may now state the essential problems in regard to this kind of truth. They may be expressed in two questions : (1) What do we mean by calling any proposition true ? and (2) How do we know that it is really true ? Or, otherwise stated, (1) What is the nature of the claim we make for it when we call it true ? and (2) How is this claim either established or discredited ? The first question relates to the nature of truth, the second to its evidence.

But before we attempt to deal with these questions, we ought, I think, to enquire more particularly, first, into the nature of the object to which the predicates 'true' and 'false' are applied, and the possession of which constitutes that object a truth or a falsity. We have agreed that our concern is with the truth of propositions, but the truth of a proposition is clearly not resident in the mere form of the words. What is true, if true, and false, if false, — and also, it may be added, what is doubtful, possible, necessary, etc., — is, primarily, what is asserted. In what is asserted we seem to have the original locus of a propositional truth. If what is asserted is true, then, and only then, is the proposition true, and thereby whatever mental act, content, or attitude it expresses on the part of the individual making or holding the proposition; and contrariwise, if it is false. Now to apply the adjectives 'true' and 'false' directly to what is asserted, we have, curiously enough, to change the form of the proposition. In the proposition something is asserted of something, something is declared to be or not to be, to happen or not to happen, or, in general, to be so-and-so characterized. If now what is asserted is to be itself characterized, if, for example, it is to be qualified as true or false, it must itself be expressed as the subject of another proposition having such a character as its predicate. And this, as especially pointed out by Meinong, is done by expressing the 'what' that is asserted by a sentence beginning with 'that,' or by some form of words equivalent to such a sentence. Thus in the proposition, "crows are black," what is asserted is *that* crows are black. The question we must now ask is, What is the logical import of such a *that*-sentence? A proper answer should throw some light on the meaning of truth.

In dealing with this question, we may proceed in either of two ways: we may abstract altogether from the thinking process and consider only the logical character of what is asserted, or we may connect the latter with the process out of which the assertion issues and the attitude in which its truth or falsity is recognized, and seek to determine its position and character relatively to that. From either point of view, its most salient feature appears to be that of belonging to an ideal realm of meaning distinct from and,

in a way, opposed to concrete and actually existent fact. That this paper is white, is neither an existing thing, like the paper, nor a real predicate of existence, like the paper's whiteness. The white paper exists, but I cannot in the same way say 'that this paper is white' exists. I do not mean that this truth can in no sense be said to be. It can be made the object of a reflective thought, it can be examined as such, it can be talked about and become the subject of other true or false propositions. Thus, if it is false that this paper is white, then that this is false, is true. The point is that what is asserted is always ideal, and is never identical in existence with the object that the assertion is about. This is true even in the case when the latter object is itself ideal. 'That 3 is greater than 2,' for example, is neither the number 3, nor the number 2, nor the greater magnitude of the one as compared with the other. This difference gives rise to the problem as to the relation of the two, the relation of the meaning to the fact meant, in which it is usual to find the defining character of truth. Leaving this for the present, I may here point to an important consequence of the distinction.

There is high authority for the doctrine that truth (and also error) is a content of predication qualifying reality, a doctrine which is developed in the assertion that perfect truth would be the universe.¹ But if our distinction holds good, either this is impossible, or it relates to another kind of truth than propositional truth. For the truth that so-and-so, for example, that this paper is white, is neither the subject of the proposition, nor the predicate, nor any quality of the object taken as real, but something quite different, namely, a truth about it. How is the case altered if for a particular finite object, like this paper, we substitute 'Reality' or the universe? For whether the content by which the subject of a proposition or judgment is qualified, — and you may interpret your proposition so as to make the 'real' subject anything you please, — whether this content, I say, be conceived as a simple quality, or as a complex of qualifying relations, or, again, be conceived in abstraction as an 'idea' divorced from

¹ "We must unhesitatingly assert that truth . . . if for itself it were perfect, would be itself in the fullest sense the entire and absolute universe." Bradley, "On Truth and Copying," *Mind*, N. S., Vol. XVI, p. 170.

existence, or concretely applied as actually qualifying an existent thing, there is, I submit, a clear distinction to be drawn between any finite object, or reality at large, taken as the subject of predication together with whatever it may be said to be or to have, and the truth (or falsity) *that* it is, or is of such a sort, or has such and such a character. The character of a being is one thing, and may be called an idea or the object of an idea, as we choose to define it; but that a being has this character is surely not an identity, pure and simple, with the character itself. If, therefore, we assume that Reality is one whole of being with a definite structure, and that this structure, its defining content, is grasped in a single thought, this thought, I suppose, might be said to possess the world in idea. But unless the thought went on to actually predicate of Reality as its structure the content thought, it would not possess the truth that Reality was so defined. But if it should effect this predication, then this truth, that Reality was so defined, would be, as truth and meaning, quite distinct from the content predicated, and this even though it were itself included in it. I am not, of course, maintaining that it is possible to grasp the world's structure without judging, or denying, on the other hand, the possibility of a speculative grasp, or æsthetic experience, of reality beyond judgment. I am only maintaining that the so-called 'truth' embodied in the content of predication, though the universe were the subject and though its whole content were exhausted in the predicate, would not be identical without difference with the truth of any possible proposition. And I accordingly deny that truth, in the propositional sense, is, properly speaking, a defining quality of any real being at all. It is neither the subject nor the predicate of a judgment; it is neither substantival nor adjectival. It is a form of ideality, but its own unique form.

Viewed *in se* this form appears, in each instance of it, to be (*a*) objective, that is, something cognized, or to be cognized, as distinct from the processes of cognizing on the part of any individual mind. Hence it may be treated, for certain purposes, independently, just as physical objects are treated independently in the physical sciences, without reference to the conditions of our

knowledge of them. It appears (*b*) as universal, that is, as claiming recognition and acknowledgment on the part of all minds. But whether it is actually acknowledged or not by any particular mind, seems indifferent to it. Failure to acknowledge it may be due to ignorance or to mental incapacity. Hence it may be maintained that truths, as such, are independent of their recognition by any mind at all. Truth, on this view, would consist in an ideal relation between what is theoretically capable of being asserted and the objective fact that the assertion, if made, would be about. So extreme a contention we may not now be prepared to admit ; but the recognition of even the relative independence of truth should serve, I think, as a salutary check on the tendency evident in recent discussion to interpret the problem of truth exclusively in terms of the process by which the claims of our ideas to recognition as true are tested and established. The view referred to would mean, I suppose, at least this, that there are real facts in the world, and hence, ideally, truths about those facts which are unknown and some of which, from the very nature of the case, are incapable of becoming known by any finite mind. And this we seem compelled to admit. For not only is knowledge progressive, so that more facts and objects get known or better known, but an infinity of facts collectively known are unknown to any single mind, and an infinity of facts once collectively known become irrecoverably lost, namely, the personal experiences of the individuals that made up the succession of all the generations past. Moreover, no finite mind knows, or pretends to know, the world's infinite multiplicity in all its details, nor the specific ground or grounds of its differences, nor all the implications of any one of its actual experiences. No one, however relative to our thought and purpose he holds the world to be, seriously believes that it is wholly plastic, that it is wholly made and remade by our volition, and that there is nothing, I will not say merely given, but given in any sense at all to be simply acknowledged, or that fact and truth only are as they are discovered by us. But if this is so, then the distinction between truth and recognized truth, as well as between truth and the process of testing and acknowledging

it, would seem to have theoretical importance, even though it should be held that what is truth for us cannot be determined concretely apart from the conditions under which it is known.¹

Relatively to the act and process of knowledge, the meaning that is capable of setting up a claim to recognition as true may be viewed in several ways. Primarily it is of the nature of a supposal. The ideal meaning may be simply entertained. So far, though the supposal be false, there is no error. If, however, it is accepted, there is judgment and belief, and the belief may be erroneous; but if it is also accepted, so to say, by the object as tested by the criteria suitable to the case in question, there is true opinion and knowledge. Three distinctions, pointed out by Meinong, seem to be essential in the analysis of judgment. We distinguish (1) the act of judging, — a temporal event in the mental history of the individual; (2) the object or subject-matter that the judgment is about, — this may be anything you please, but it is at any rate something other than the thinking and the particular thought that aims at the knowledge of it; and (3) the thought or supposal as an ideal, but immanent, objective content, — what the object is thought as, and what is asserted in the proposition. Here the problem of truth concerns the relation of the 'immanent,' thought-possessed, but objective content of the supposal to the contrasted 'transcendent' or quasi-transcendent object that the supposal's content means to be true of.

Another way of viewing the matter is to consider the supposal, the content of meaning expressed in the that-sentence, as of the nature of an answer to a question, or the solution of a problem.²

¹ Besides objectivity and universality, it is usual to ascribe timelessness and unchangeability also to what is asserted, taken as true; and these characters, interpreted in a logical and not in a temporal sense, would seem to hold except in cases where the notion of time enters into the predication, and there the relations are peculiar. If the reference is to past time, the truth (*e. g.*, that Cæsar existed) would not be true before the event, but would be unalterably true after it; if to future time, it would be unchangeably true before the event, and would cease to be true after it; while, if referring to present time, its truth would be limited to the present. The facts may be otherwise interpreted so as to make the truth appear timeless in all cases, and only its recognition an event. But the matter cannot be further pursued here. Given the fact, however, the special relation of its own truth to it is timeless in any case.

² It is from this point of view that Stout treats, successfully, I think, the problem of error in his essay in *Personal Idealism*. The point of view itself, however,

I do not, of course, mean that every time we frame a proposition we first consciously propound a question. But we can always put a question to which the proposition gives the answer. It answers such questions as whether, or what, or why, or how. And so far as it is an intelligible proposition, it is a specific answer to a specific question, and its truth or falsity must be judged with reference to its intention to answer just that question. This is but the familiar doctrine that we can't tell, and can't even properly inquire, whether a proposition is true or false till we know what it means, that is, what it means to assert and about what. And herein lies one of the most fruitful sources of error, that we don't always ourselves know what precisely it is that we do mean. It has been held, indeed, that this vagueness infects, in some degree, all our thinking, and that no one in asserting knows precisely the sense in which he affirms or denies.¹ But this assertion must itself, on the hypothesis, be at least a little vague, and must mean something at least a little different from what it seems to mean. Is it necessary to push scepticism so far? We can hardly hope in all cases to escape the pitfalls of language. But there are cases where our meanings can be referred to well-defined abstract relations, as in mathematics, and a sensible fact, to which other of our meanings are relative, can be, if not defined, pointed out and experienced. Our meanings must, in any case, be adequate to our purposes. Assuming that our meanings can be made adequate to our purposes, we demand of the proposition that it shall satisfactorily meet the conditions of our problem. The problem of truth, then, is to determine what, in specific cases, these satisfactory conditions may be.

With these considerations in mind, we now ask, What do we mean by calling a proposition true?—for a proposition is certainly not made true simply by being called so. The question, therefore, is, What is meant by a proposition being true? True, we ask, to what? and also, to whom?

The answers commonly given to these questions are, as we all goes back to Plato, who represents thinking as a sort of conversation in which the soul asks and answers questions. When the thought is decided, says yes or no, we have *δόξα*, or judgment. See Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre*, p. 115.

¹ Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 367.

know, these. A proposition is true when the idea, thought, or meaning it expresses agrees with reality, or the facts,—reality, or fact, being what it is true to; and, a proposition is true when the thought it expresses coincides with what would be the thought of an ideal thinker who had actual knowledge of the facts,—such an ideal thinker, actual or merely conceived, being the subject for whom it is true. In either case a proposition is called on to validate its claim to truth by reference to a standard, on the one hand, the standard of fact, on the other, the standard of an ideal thought. In the first case, the emphasis is on the verifiable objectivity; in the second, on the logical universality of truth. This, in its most general terms, is the ‘intellectualist’ view of truth; and so long as we stick to these most general terms and ask no embarrassing questions, it is the view which we all, I suppose, in a manner, accept. At any rate our leading pragmatist assures us that the definition of truth as agreement, and of falsity as disagreement, of our ideas with reality is accepted by pragmatists and intellectualists alike as ‘a matter of course.’¹

But the difficulty here is to agree on what we mean by the terms of this definition. Following the indications already given, we come to some such conclusions as the following.

First as to the ‘idea.’ The truth we are considering being truth of propositions, the idea must not be taken primarily as a bit of psychic existence, a subjective state of mind or an event occurring in the flow of consciousness; nor must it be taken as a single term, like the idea of ‘red’ or of ‘equality’: such single terms or concepts, apart from their use in propositions, may be said perhaps to be accurate or inaccurate, but cannot be said to be either true or false. The idea that is to ‘agree with reality’ must be the whole objective, immanent meaning of the supposal, that so-and-so.

With this understanding of the term ‘idea,’ we ought to have no great difficulty in explaining what, in general, we mean by the other term in the relation of agreement declared to be essential to the constitution of a truth. The term ‘reality’ is, indeed, in my judgment, unfortunate, since it suggests too much the idea of either a physical or a metaphysical entity. But true proposi-

¹ James, *Pragmatism*, p. 198.

tions may be made about anything thinkable, and the range of the thinkable is unlimited. True propositions may be made, for example, about imaginary objects, like Alice in Wonderland, and impossible objects, like the *perpetuum mobile* and ropes of sand, as well as about things that actually exist and events that actually happen; and although these propositions may be interpreted as having an indirect reference to a world of objects regarded as more truly 'real,' it hardly seems necessary to do this in all cases in order to give them an intelligible meaning or to acquire insight into their truth.¹ But undoubtedly propositions, whether true or false, mean to assert about something. They may be taken as meaning to answer a specific question which one might intelligibly ask about the something in question. And obviously the right answer, the answer which would satisfy the interest of knowledge, whatever other interests it might or might not satisfy, would depend on the constitution, actual or ideal, of the object or subject-matter of the inquiry, and not alone on the cognitive activities and subjective interests of the thinker. He may even have himself made the object, in the more obvious sense of 'made'; it may be his sonnet; or it may be the experiences which are special to him and in their uniqueness unsharable, like the interior play of his mental imagery: the object once constituted, be its constitution eternal or limited in existence to the fleeting moment, demands cognitive recognition in its own right and dictates the terms under which a true answer can be given to any intelligible question about it. By 'reality' or 'fact,' then, in this connection, we mean whatever in the object of the thought or subject-matter of the enquiry must be taken account of in determining the nature of the answer, satisfactory to the intelligence, to a specific and intelligible question about it. 'Fact' is whatever in the object, be it sensible or ideal, a thing or event or action or attribute or any mode of relation, so controls the process of knowing *that* object as to make the thought or supposal not only acceptable to the individual thinker, but fit for acceptance universally; for such universality is logically implied, as we have seen, in the conception of truth. Thought so controlled is true,

¹ Attention may be called in this connection to the important investigations in *Gegenstandstheorie* by Meinong and his school.

whatever subjective motives may guide and inspire it; thought not so controlled yields no knowledge, however great the subjective assurance to the contrary. And perhaps so far there is no real ground for dispute. The dispute, I suppose, would relate to the nature of the control. Certainly no intellectualist has emphasized more strongly the coerciveness of outer fact and of certain 'relations of ideas' or, as we should prefer to say, ideal objects that function as facts than Professor James. He admits expressly that at least certain truths are determined in advance of our recognitions and any pragmatic testing of them.¹

I might be expected, perhaps, at this point to consider whether the 'reality' with which our ideas, to be true, should agree is not, in the end, no special and particular fact, least of all such imaginary objects as fairy tales and such impossible objects as round squares and ropes of sand, but 'absolute' reality, whose content, or one of whose aspects, is 'absolute' truth, which sets the standard for all 'truth' that is merely relative and finite. But a thorough discussion of this view would lead us too far, and I have already, I think, sufficiently indicated my position. I admit, certainly, that truths are connected together and tend to cohere in systems, though I have not been able to see that one truth interferes with another truth in the system from relation to which it derives an added significance. And I admit, of course, the linkages of facts, but I am similarly unable to see that one fact, from the point of view from which it is the particular fact that it is, is transcended and annulled through relation to other facts. The idea is thus suggested of an ultimate system of reality and an ultimate system of coherent truth, and this may perhaps be called 'absolute.' But, as we have seen, no such conspectus of the systematic connection of all realities and of all truths is attainable by man, and it is even conceivable that no such ideal system, completely self-fulfilled, actually exists, but that it is the end-term of a creative process in the universe itself. The universe has, we assume, a fundamental nature and constitution, and this grounds the possibility of truth, but also, we must add, of error. Meanwhile, as our Hegelian teachers tell us, anything may be taken as 'real' which

¹ "The hundredth decimal of π is predetermined ideally now, though no one may have computed it." *Pragmatism*, p. 211.

is taken for what it is and not for something that it is not. From this point of view, I have insisted that the truth of a proposition must be judged from its own chosen standpoint, the particular question it means to answer, and the special reality, fact, or object it selects and intends. And since our theme is the truth of propositions, and any proposition about the 'Absolute' and its relation to finite truth would, from our point of view, be no more true and would certainly seem much more difficult to establish than a proposition telling us, for example, what o'clock it is; since, practically, in many cases we have no need to appeal to the high court of metaphysics to derive satisfactory answers to our questions, and in many others have simply to ignore our metaphysical theories to get any valuable answers at all; since no way has ever been devised whereby we could use the 'absolute' criterion to measure our other truths by; since the conception of such a criterion and the conclusions drawn from it imply a conception of truth different from the propositional; and since, finally, we are assured that, in the end, there is no relation between truth and reality at all, since, in the end, there are no separate terms,¹ whereas this relation is just now our problem: I hope that these reasons for not pursuing the subject further may be deemed sufficient.

A difficulty might, however, be found in the conception of a relation of truth to fact, in that what is taken to be true is also taken to be the fact. If it is true, for example, that I exist, then that I exist is also a fact. Hence, it might be argued, there can be no relation of agreement or correspondence between truth and fact, since no difference between them can be discovered.² The difficulty, I take it, is purely verbal, and may be escaped by a verbal distinction. We may distinguish, if we choose, between fact that and fact of; the real distinction is between the object of the assertion and the content of the supposal or judgment. My existence is a fact, and the truth that I exist is also a fact; but the latter is surely not precisely and numerically identical with the fact of my existence, regarded as 'the real content of my

¹ Bradley, "On Truth and Copying," *Mind*, N. S., Vol. XVI, p. 172 f.

² So G. E. Moore, article on "Truth" in Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 717 (*b*).

being. It is a fact that the horse is a mammal, but this truth does not take into itself bodily the quadruped and its mammalian character, nor does it itself enter into the beast's vitals.

What, then, we at length ask, is the nature of that relation between idea and fact indicated by the term 'agreement'? Ideas to be true must agree with the facts, but how agree?

The view that a truth is, in some literal fashion, a 'copy' of the fact, is now pretty generally discredited. Too much honor is done it when it is accorded a limited sphere of validity in the relation of the mental image to its original. For granted that the image is a true and faithful copy, it (the image) is no more a truth, in the propositional sense, than any external resembling object; and the truth that it is like the original, while clearly in some sense agreeing with the fact of the resemblance of which it takes account, neither is that resemblance nor a copy of it. Yet even those writers who are most emphatic in rejecting the copy theory of truth not infrequently employ language which implies some form of correspondence. They will complain that their own views are *misrepresented*, or that those of their opponents bear no sort of *likeness* to the facts. And quite lately Mr. Bradley, after demolishing, from his own point of view, the copy theory as false in principle, goes on to mention four senses in which, from a lower point of view (which is, of course, our own), truth may be said to correspond with reality and even to reproduce fact. It is interesting to observe that the first three of these senses, referring to the acquisition of truth (the fourth referring to its communication), reduce essentially to that demand for the control of thought by the object, of which I have spoken: the individual must suppress what is special to him to attain what the thought of the many individuals must conform to; he must follow the object in whose ideal development he coöperates; and he must take up in reflection the given qualities of sensible matter and accept more or less brute conjunctions of fact.¹ These meanings may be generalized in the statement that a thought, to be true, must submit to the control of whatever objective conditions predetermine its fitness for universal acceptance.

¹ "On Truth and Copying," *Mind*, N. S., Vol. XVI, p. 174 f.

But the 'correspondence' of truth with fact is usually taken as a static relation in the result of thinking. Can any intelligible meaning be given to this conception? I incline to think that there can, although I admit a difficulty in expressing it, and shall, therefore, not be surprised if what I am about to say may seem crude and unsatisfactory. Still I am convinced that there is such a relation. Take, for example, the mental image which, by hypothesis, resembles, or copies, the percept. This object we both think and think about. Hence an ambiguity in the conception of the 'content' of our thought. On the one hand, *what* is thought is the object, the mental image. But this image, as we have seen, is not a truth, but an existent fact, whose resemblance to the percept demands our recognition. On the other hand, *what* is thought is that this object resembles the percept. And this, by hypothesis, is true and a truth. But *this* objective content of the thought,—to repeat a reflection now familiar,—is neither the image, nor the percept, nor anything that bears the slightest resemblance to them. It is the thought, and in the proposition the assertion, of *their* resemblance. But how could this assertion be truly made unless the meaning of both terms and the meaning of their resemblance were contained and established ideally in the thought of them? We use, to express the presence to a mind of this meaning of the object, the metaphor of reflection, and this suggests a prior independent existence of the object and some sort of copying. But there need be no priority in time, nor need the object have an existence beyond thought or apart from its presence in the reflection. The conception suits equally well an idealistic and a realistic interpretation. The full thought, in fact, is a reflected thought: it is at once a thought of and a thought about. And the complexion,—the terms and relations that make up the complex structure,—of the intended object, in that aspect of it which is at the time in question, must, it would seem, be ideally taken up into and define the complexion of the reflected content, whenever that content is true. Or we may say, perhaps, that it is the same content from different points of regard. It is impossible to avoid metaphors; but they must not be unduly pressed. The reflection in

thought is not on all fours with reflection in a mirror; it does not in the same way 'copy' its object; it apprehends and ideally assimilates it. I am speaking here, of course, of recognized truths. As to truths unrecognized by any human mind, we should have, I suppose, to define them,—apart from the admission of other forms of mind, and ultimately an omniscient mind,—as the capacity in the object—it is impossible to avoid the thought-reference—to manifest itself to some mind as being of the sort, character, or complexion that it is, that is, that it has in it to be seen to be whenever, under describable conditions, it is so manifested.

Truth, then, as related to the act of cognition, is intellectually reflected fact. The important question then is, How do you know, especially when the object referred to is not palpably present, that the assumed or reflected fact is truly so? How do you know in the given case that the thought has submitted so completely to the control of fact as to be not merely accepted as true, but worthy of acceptance?

In the course of reflection on this subject, various criteria have been proposed: the force and liveliness of the impression, clearness and distinctness of the thought, inconceivability of the opposite, coherency and systematic connection of ideas, verifiability in some definite experience. To some only certain propositions have seemed to require a criterion by which their certainty might be assured, other propositions appearing as self-evident. To some, again, the differences in propositions and in the kinds of subject-matter have seemed to demand corresponding differences in the criteria of their truth; Aristotle, we remember, regarded it as a mark of defective education to require the same kind of evidence in ethics that is demanded in mathematics. At the present time the most prominent candidate for favor in this field offers us a universal criterion; it is the theory of pragmatism that every claimant to truth is tested by the satisfactoriness of its working. But pragmatism is more catholic still; for while explaining how truth is tested, it professes at the same time to explain what truth is. Truth, it says in effect, is not a quality belonging from all eternity to some propositions and not to others; it is something

made in the process of what is called validation or verification. This conception gives a new meaning to the idea of 'agreement' in the definition of truth. The process of truth-making implies, not a static agreement, but a 'fitting' of the idea or meaning with the facts functionally, so that we are led by the idea from a less to a more satisfactory experience, from a less to a more satisfactory mode of thought, and are thus enabled to deal with our experience, in its various parts and aspects and as a whole, more effectively than if, instead of adopting the idea or supposition which is thus established as true, we had adopted some other idea or supposition. The test of a claimant to truth, then, is just this effective working; and that it works effectively, that it leads to good and useful consequences, leads to harmony and control of the processes of our experience, is precisely what we mean by calling it true. What does not so lead is rejected as, and is, error. Thus the whole problem of truth is solved at a stroke. You *know* that your thought is true, pragmatism says, when being acted on, being followed out in its consequences, theoretical or practical, it leads directly or indirectly to the specific experience which it promised, and thereby enables you to deal with the concrete situations of your life and with your life as a whole in ways which yield, in the long run, the greatest amount of satisfaction. You know it is true, because you choose to call that true which does this. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; the key that fits is the one that turns the lock.

If this account is correct, the gist of the pragmatist's contention about truth may be expressed in three propositions: (1) The test of the truth of an idea, supposal, proposition, judgment, or belief is its serviceableness in use; (2) truth, in the only intelligible meaning of the term, is a quality belonging to the ideas, beliefs, etc., that are capable of meeting this test; (3) since use is relative to ever-changing conditions, truth lives and has its being in a process of development, — it is something made, not ready-made, or, put bluntly, it is an event that happens.

With the first of these propositions, that which declares the test of truth to lie in its serviceableness in use, I at least, provided I am allowed to interpret the phrase, have no quarrel. A claim-

ant to truth, whenever its truth is not self-evident, must submit to be tested ; and it is difficult to see how it could be better tested than by putting it to work. Even a 'self-evident' truth, like the law of identity, is known only by abstraction from its use in innumerable instances, and gets its meaning defined and qualified by application. How otherwise, while acknowledging that *S* is *S* and *P*, *P*, should we not hesitate ever to utter a simple proposition of the form *S* is *P*? But here everything depends on the interpretation. 'Serviceableness in use' may be taken so narrowly as to make a lie which saves a life or extricates from an embarrassment a splendid truth, and the recognition of a disaster which paralyzes the energies of the man affected by it a fatal error. On the other hand, it may be taken so broadly as to include all other criteria, and especially that of the systematic coherency or harmony of experience and thought, since one of the uses of 'true' thought will certainly be to reduce the various items of our world to consistency, and to develop insight into and comprehension of the nature of things. Of the second proposition I am more doubtful ; for though I admit that theoretically every truth implies capacity of verification, I am by no means sure that this is the sole meaning of truth, and still less convinced that we are justified in assuming that every truth must needs be capable of actual verification under the conditions of our human experience. As there are even now truths acknowledged of some which are yet unacknowledged of many, why may there not be truths forever incapable of being thought, acknowledged, or validated by any human individual? I understand, however, the pragmatist to mean that every truth has an actual or potential existence in human experience. This is suggested by the third proposition, which appears to make truth a quality of our knowledge, and change and growth in our knowledge a process of change and growth in truth. Our analysis leads to a different interpretation. I have maintained, namely, that we must distinguish in cognition the act or process, the object that it is about, and the objective content of the supposal, the meaning expressed in a that-sentence when truth or falsity is predicated of the proposition. I have further maintained that true and false are

primarily predicates of this objective meaning and only secondarily predicates of our judgments and beliefs. Finally, I have contended that this meaning is not a subjective apprehension, but an objectively apprehended somewhat, having logical characters of its own, much as physical objects have physical characters, independent of their recognition by any finite mind. Consequently I hold, with Mr. B. Russell, that some propositions, that is, their objective meanings, are true, and some false, just as some roses are red and some white; in other words, that the proposition, if true, bears, as such, a purely logical relation to the fact that it is true of, and that this relation is not a process or event, like the cognitive process through which it gets into our minds, but merely,—to use the familiar expression,—one that ideally holds or obtains. Hence the claim to universality, a claim which, of course, if it is to be acknowledged, must be tested in a process of knowledge, but the validity or falsity of which is not first made when it is first made out. Thus the realm of meanings to which the objectives of our judgments belong constitutes, in my view, not a realm of actualities, but one of ideal possibilities. Unless we are prepared for the metaphysical interpretation of a universal consciousness, it cannot be said to exist, save as particular items of it appear from time to time in recognizing minds. What sort of existence has the truth that Cæsar once lived when nobody is thinking it? The presence of a truth in a consciousness, from the logical point of view, can only be regarded as an accident, that is, as an incident due to empirical conditions, and not necessarily contained in the conception of the meaning. It is something that the individual mind may become conscious of, but again may not. It may be objected that this notion of an objective truth distinct from the objective fact that it is the truth of and logically independent of subjective belief, is a fiction. It may plausibly be held that the only terms we have here to deal with are the objective fact and somebody's idea, opinion, or belief about the fact, and that the only question at issue is that of their relation, which is also a fact. I should reply to this by saying that, of course, the question cannot be raised about the truth of any particular statement unless the statement is first made, and this

certainly implies the existence of the ideas or belief involved in somebody's mind. But when we consider more closely what the statement means, we find that its meaning is not limited, as is the act of judgment or the disposition of belief that it defines, to its existence in the temporal flow of anybody's consciousness. This is a peculiarity of the logical aspect of our thought, and this, I take it, is as deserving of recognition as are the facts of mental or of extra-mental existence.

Pragmatism, in the view of its advocates, is so much the subject of misunderstanding that I shall not be surprised if I am told that my criticism is beside the point. I have the feeling myself that it may be so ; for the writings of those who are commonly regarded as pragmatists make on me the impression of a conflux of tendencies rather than that of a settled doctrine that has been worked out to a common agreement. It is hard sometimes to tell whether a particular statement by a pragmatist writer is to be taken literally, or whether it is to be taken sympathetically, with a large license to the imagination. My object, however, is not so much to criticise as to offer considerations that may serve to bring out discussion and to clear up a situation that certainly at present seems not a little confused. At the risk, therefore, of appearing to misunderstand and in the hope of a solution, I will venture to mention two other difficulties that have occurred to me in the endeavor to follow the current of the pragmatist tendency. The first relates to the instrumental character of thought, the second to truth's claim of universality.

1. Pragmatism insists, as we have done, on particular truths rather than on the 'truth' of system, on relative truth rather than on truth absolute, recognizing, however, as we also have done, the important function of particular truths to hang together in systems. But whereas we have regarded the supposal or belief so to say structurally, as in itself reflecting or not reflecting the state of the facts, pragmatism, at least in one of its tendencies, appears to regard it solely in its instrumental character as a plan of action and means of effective control of situations. But, granting the instrumental nature of thought, must we not also in the end adopt once more the structural point of view? The idea con-

ceived, let us say, as a plan of action, — though many of our ideas, and notably those of the man in the much discussed illustration who, lost in the woods, ideally constructs his environment, seem rather to instigate than to be themselves plans of action, — the idea, we will suppose, has been worked out ; it has been verified ; it has fulfilled its purpose ; it has been found true. What, then, we ask, is the relation of this true, validated, fulfilled idea to the facts ? We surely cannot say now that it is true because it leads to consequences which validate it, for whatever further consequences it may have, it has already been validated. Pragmatism perhaps might answer that in this case we read the consequences retrospectively. But even so, the process has clearly come to a pause, been summed up, stands there in its result relatively complete. We have discovered, for example, that the creature dimly discerned through the foliage was a stag by tracking and shooting it ; does the now verified truth that it is this noble animal mean only the particular hunting activities by which this truth has been surely ascertained ? Or does it mean certain further consequences to be realized by action, for example, the supper by the camp fire and the antlered trophy in the hall at home ? It means, that is, suggests, implies, stands for, leads up to all this, or it may ; but does it not, as truth, mean a certain structural relation of the ideas to the fact, and does it not mean this all along ?

2. Pragmatists seem at times to come perilously near saying that what seems true to you is true, provided it effectively meets your requirements ; or, again, that it is true, if it meets the temporary demands of a group or generation. Truth is in the making ; the truth of one age is the error of the next. And if we say, not that truth is useful, but that truth is the useful or the expedient, are we not bound to say that whatever is found useful in any respect, as, for example, in satisfying an emotional interest, is true in so far forth ? Hence the charge that for pragmatism truth is ‘any old thing that works.’ This would, of course, be absurd. To interpret the doctrine, we must say, I think, that nothing is ever true simply, but is only true for me, for you, or for them. But how does this agree with the demand of logical universality that every proposition taken for true

claims? The pragmatist theory of truth itself, for example, is just now urging its claims to general acceptance, not because Professor James and a few other philosophers find that it 'works,' or proves satisfactory, to them, but because, being a true theory, we, as reasonable beings, ought to accept it; and were Professor James alone in his belief, an *Athanasius contra mundum*, he would still, I presume, find its lack of social recognition no evidence of its failure as truth, but would, appealing to future experience, try more than ever to convert the rest of us. How now does the pragmatist explain this character of logical universality which even he, when he argues with us, assumes to belong to *his* truth? I cannot speak for him; but taking him literally, in some of his utterances, I should suppose he might say, we make this demand because, on the whole, we find it *better* to assume that we live in a common world, and that truths about it are common truths, than to assume that every man has a private truth and world of his own; it works better intellectually and practically. 'On the whole' it no doubt does. But the pragmatic testing, I supposed, was to be applied not merely in general, but in particular. And in the case of the martyrs of science who have died for *their* truth, might it not have seemed to 'work' better to conform to the generally accepted opinions, to what we now characterize as prejudice and error? I am speaking not of the inherent agreement of truth and fact which, with its implication of a constitution in the nature of fact, is the anti-pragmatist's explanation of universality, but of its relation to general recognition. How in a particular case can pragmatism justify, in this regard, a deviation from accepted social standards? The appeal, in the case of such a departure, is not to actual and effective working in this regard, but to an ideal possible working, which assumes the principle, but which gives, and in the nature of the case can give, no actual verification of it. It is not enough to reply that the martyrs of science found it more satisfactory to die faithful to their convictions than to surrender their convictions to the popular clamor, for this only gives us the criterion of private feeling and not effective working on the whole. So far as appears, we shall have to adopt, on the principles of pure pragma-

tism, one of two alternatives : either the assumed logical universality of truth is without justification, since there are instances in which it cannot be practically verified, — in which case, it may be disallowed, whenever to do so seems to work better ; or it is justified by the fact that it is found to hold in many or the majority of instances, — in which case, the appeal is made to mere numbers. But the principle itself is appealed to in every discussion that aims to convince by argument. Hence it seems to be something that claims acceptance not merely because it works, but because it is seen to be the indispensable condition of any finally harmonious working in a world rationally ordered and socially common. The objection that pragmatism fails to give a satisfactory account of the universality of truth has been frequently made. It was urged, for example, by Professor Royce in his address before this Association four years ago at the meeting at Princeton ; it has recently been urged, with great acuteness, from a somewhat different point of view, by Professor Baldwin in his work on Genetic Logic.¹ This, perhaps, more than anything else, is the stumbling-block in the way of many to accepting the pragmatist's account of truth as final and complete. It is greatly to be hoped that discussion may bring out the true bearing of the pragmatist's contention on this point, that we may see clearly what justification, if any, can be given to the demand that what is true for me shall be true for you also.

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¹ See especially the article "On Truth," *Psychological Review*, July, 1907.